Interoperability in Virginia

CICO Corner
By Chris Essid

I am pleased to report that FY 2006 has been a great year for interoperability in Virginia. Over the past year, the State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC), Advisory Group, and Initiative Action Teams (IATs) helped my office implement the FY06 Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability making real progress towards achieving our 2015 vision.

With the fiscal year coming to an end, I am excited to share some of our major accomplishments. Over the past year, the CICO institutionalized a Project Management Office (PMO) to support the interoperable communications efforts in the Commonwealth. Practitioners contributed time and energy to the IATs identifying and promoting common language protocols, coordinating statewide 800 MHz rebanding efforts, and making significant progress towards developing and promoting statewide technical standards and operational protocols. Lastly, the CICO is increasing its outreach efforts - including new practitioners in the process to enhance our collective ability to improve public safety communications. Without a doubt, Virginia's interoperability effort is establishing the precedent for how communications interoperability can be improved statewide!

In other news, the CICO is moving once again! Due to planed renovations to the Ninth Street Office Building we have to vacate the building. The CICO will be located at the Old City Hall Building, 1001 East Broad Street, Suite 140 starting in mid-June. In addition, the office has acquired extra computers creating work stations for practitioners to use if needed. Please contact us if you will be in the Richmond area and need a place to catch up on e-mail or print out a few things – we are happy to have you!

Thanks again to all of our practitioners who have made this year a success!

Chris Essid

Chris Essid
Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator

Practitioner Spotlight:
Chief Bill Bullock

Bill Bullock is a retired battalion chief from the Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department. During his tenure, he served in a variety of positions in EMS, Hazardous Materials, and Fire Suppression. Chief Bullock represented Northern Virginia on the Governor's Advisory Board for EMS for 7 years, and has been a member of a number of local, regional, state, and national committees. He holds an Associates Degree in Secondary Education from Bluefield College, an Associates Degree in Fire Administration from Northern Virginia Community College, and a Bachelor's Degree in Health & Physical Education from James Madison University.

Each Newsletter will feature a Public Safety Practitioner that has had an impact on Virginia Interoperability. For this newsletter we interviewed Bill Bullock, the FY 2006 Chair of the State Interoperability Advisory Group, and this is what he had to say:

In your opinion, what is the biggest interoperability challenge in Virginia?
The biggest interoperability challenge is making interoperability work at the practitioner level. Overcoming this challenge will require a series of steps. These steps include designing the systems needed to make individual agencies interoperable while providing training and education to first responders on the proper operation of them. However, before this is done, we need to assess all the agencies to ensure that each of them is *operable* before we can make them *inter*operable.

What prepared you for your position as Advisory Group Chair?
I have 28 and a half years of credited service as a first responder with the vast majority of it spent as a field provider in both Fire and EMS. Following my retirement from the field, I spent two years as a subject matter specialist with the Department of Homeland Security in the Assistance to Firefighter Grant program.

What prepared you for your job?
During my career, I participated in the Fairfax County radio users group. The group was a collection of service providers, technicians, and administrators that met on a regular basis to assess the capabilities and limitations of both voice and data systems. I also participated in the Urban Search and Rescue program for 13 years. I was involved on both national and international level with response and training programs, each of which needed singular or multiple communication systems links to various types of networks.

What is the biggest lesson you have learned from your job?
From the SIEC [of which Bill serves as Vice Chair], the biggest lesson is learning all of the various components (people and technology) that have a capability to contribute, and then being able to bring them together to reach agreement on operations and functions.

If you weren't doing what you are doing, what would you want to do?
Well, I am currently a contractor with the International Association of Fire Chiefs and a staff liaison for the national mutual aid project. Through the project we help states develop successful statewide plans that enable them to move their assets and resources outside of the state during emergency response situations. The effort began after Katrina and will take several years to complete. Currently I spend a lot of time dealing with National, Federal, and State agencies involved with resource inventory and the movement of those resources from point A to point B.

Pushing Progress: PMO Update

2006 Local Grants

The State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC) received $2 million in State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP) funds to award to localities for interoperable communications projects. The SIEC held a competitive grant process in December and January and received 38 submissions, including five regional applications. The total amount of funds requested was $3,290,285. Of the 38 submissions, twenty-eight, including three regional submissions, for a total of 31 localities were awarded the $2million.

Localities in all seven state homeland security regions received funding from the local interoperability grant process. Regions 1, 2 and 5 had four awardees each; region 3, three awardees; region 4, five awardees; region 6, six awardees, and region 7 had two awardees. The scope of the funded projects include purchasing cache radios, data solutions, replacing outdated dispatch consoles, a radio communications study, purchasing tower sites and repeaters, and deploying COMLINC.

Meetings with the Secretaries, General Assembly Members, Congressional Delegation
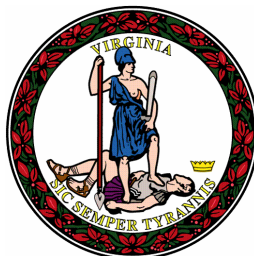
In an effort to promote Virginia's interoperability effort among state officials, the Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator (CIC) is reaching out to all of Governor Kaine's Cabinet Secretaries, members of the General Assembly and key members of Virginia's Congressional Delegation. The purpose of these meetings is to rally support behind the Commonwealth's interoperability effort, educate government leaders about the importance of seeking a statewide interoperable communications solution and presenting challenges to reaching desired solutions.

Support and understanding of the interoperability challenges from executive and legislative leaders is vital to maintain and grow the Commonwealth's interoperability effort for first-responder communications. These meetings are aimed to seek out and solidify support.

Recent Events

May 11th Advisory Group Meeting

On May 11, 2006, 47 representatives from the State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC), Advisory Group and Initiative Action Teams (IAT) met for a day-long session to review IAT recommendations and develop a final set of recommended FY 07 initiatives for SIEC consideration. This effort serves to update and enhance the Commonwealth of Virginia Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability as we prepare for another year of implementation. The FY 07 Plan will be the third edition of the Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability. New and continuing initiatives are designed to be accomplished during FY 07 in our effort to work towards the 2015 Vision.

3

Lynchburg Regional Planning Session
by Captain Mark Patterson, Lynchburg Police Department

The City of Lynchburg was recognized as the MSA (metropolitan statistical area) for Division 3 of the Commonwealth of Virginia and was therefore requested to submit a grant application for interoperability for the region. A partnership was developed between the Lynchburg Police Department, the Virginia State Police and the Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator's Office (CICO). The team effort produced a successful grant application which was one of 26 awards nationwide resulting in nearly $1.9 million. The grant proposal included 23 localities which include the cities of Lynchburg, Bedford, Charlottesville, Staunton, and Waynesboro, the counties of Albemarle, Amherst, Appomattox, Augusta, Buckingham, Campbell, Charlotte, Bedford, Cumberland, Fluvanna, Halifax, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nelson, Prince Edward, and Rockingham, and the towns of Farmville and South Boston.

Regional Spotlight: Connecting Hampton Roads for Safety

The Hampton Roads region of southeastern Virginia has a population of about 1.6 million and is the fourth largest metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. It consists of 16 separate cities and counties with a combined land mass of almost 3,000 square miles. Hampton Roads is home to the third largest port in the country and more than a dozen military installations (including the NATO Allied Command Transformation). Considering these factors and the potentially devastating effect that a large-scale natural or man-made disaster could have on the region, communications and emergency preparedness are of critical importance. A key component of that preparedness is a communications system network that provides interoperability among local, regional, state, federal and Department of Defense public safety first responders.

The Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) consists of representatives from each of the 16 cities and counties that make up Hampton Roads and exists to help solve local and regional transportation and planning issues. The HRPDC is currently assisting in solving the problem of regional interoperability by utilizing funds from a port security grant to implement a microwave network that can provide voice and data transport throughout the Hampton Roads region.

In addition to the microwave system, Virginia Beach was awarded a Homeland Security grant and is working with members of the Hampton Roads Trunked User's Group (HRTUG) in the implementation of a nationally recognized regional 700 MHz Project 25 (P25) voice system and high speed mobile data system. The related effort called ORION (Overlay Regional Interoperability Network) will provide a wide area mobile data and P25 radio system in support of the region's public safety first responders.

Hampton Roads will be one of the first regions in the country to test multiple new technologies to support regional interoperability. The anticipated success of these projects will provide valuable lessons learned in the areas of cooperative procurement, regional operations and technical aspects that can be utilized by agencies nationwide. Once the operational and technical solutions have been successfully implemented, Hampton Roads will build on the foundational charters to grow the interoperability solutions further throughout the region.

Each newsletter will feature a Local or Regional Spotlight. Ideas for the next Spotlight can be directed to Melissa McMenemy at melissa.mcmenemy@governor.virginia.gov.

Federal Report:
SAFECOM Industry Summit

On March 23, 2006, the Department of Homeland Security's SAFECOM program hosted its Inaugural Industry Summit. The event drew an audience of over 300 individuals representing several disciplines. These include: public safety, the communications industry, federal government, state and local government, industry associations, and standards development associations.

The Industry Summit afforded SAFE-COM and the Public Safety community a valuable opportunity to begin engaging with the telecommunications industry on critical interoperability issues. The summit provided a forum to discuss the following:

- Public Safety's role with the SAFECOM program
- Understanding the Public Safety Statement of Requirements (SoR)
- The development of standards and the opportunities created for new public safety technologies
- SAFECOM technology initiatives and how they can be leveraged by industry to better align research, development, and testing and evaluation efforts with public safety communication needs.

Several goals were accomplished by the SAFECOM Industry Summit. First, a conversation on interoperability initiatives occurred between SAFECOM, industry, and public safety. Secondly, SAFECOM was able to clarify their role and vision in the pursuit of wireless interoperability: a coordinator between public safety, industry and other federal interoperability programs in pursuit of a system of systems approach that is based on public safety needs. SAFECOM was also able to clarify the program's technical initiatives and their purpose and connection to interoperability. Third, the Summit provided industry with an opportunity to provide feedback during the meeting and further feedback via the SAFECOM website (www.safecomprogram.gov). Participants from the Commonwealth of Virginia included Mr. Chris Essid, Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator; Captain Eddie Reyes, Alexandria Police Department; and Fire Chief Charles Werner, City of Charlottesville.

(Lynchburg Regional Planning Session continued from page 4)

The goal of the project is to establish interoperable voice communications within the division and eventually throughout the state. The initial phase, considered to be the first step in creating true interoperability throughout the Commonwealth, will allow voice communications between all participating localities from their existing systems. Future plans provide for voice communications from anywhere in the Commonwealth.

Ironically, the greatest challenge to date is communication. A huge step forward was realized at our first stakeholders' meeting as we had 100% locality participation. The greatest challenges are gathering and compiling information from the disparate radio systems and creating a suitable Request for Proposal (RFP) that will enable us to successfully meet our goal. It has been noted that 90% of grants involving multiple agencies fail. This statistic only serves as motivation for this effort as Virginians are passionate about the safety of its citizens, possess a can do attitude and will continue to lead the country in the development and realization of a true interoperability solution.

(Pushing Progress continued from page 3)

Strategic Plan Update

The annual review and update of the Commonwealth of Virginia Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability is required by the Virginia code to ensure that the Plan continues to meet the needs of practitioners. The update of the Plan marks the next step towards achieving the 2015 vision of improved communications interoperability on a local, regional, state and federal level. The Advisory Group met for a day-long session to review the recommendations of the Initiative Action Teams (IATs) and develop a final set of recommendations for SIEC consideration to update and enhance the Plan. Implementation of the FY 2007 Plan will begin on July 1, 2006.

Office Performance Measures

The Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator's Office (CICO) developed two comprehensive and aggressive long term performance measures at an April 25th, 2006 working group session. These measures were established to determine the effectiveness of the Commonwealth's interoperability effort. The measures meet the requirements of the Virginia Planning and Budget Office and will achieve the following:

- Guide management decisions in terms of resources and efforts
- Achieve desired levels of interoperability within the Commonwealth by 2015
- Align budget requests and grant funding with the Mission
- Guide the update of the Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability
-

The measures identified during this session and presented below are the long-term performance measures and were collaboratively designed and mutually agreed upon by the working group. The CICO aims to:

- Increase the ability of local, regional, and state agencies to communicate with voice and data.
- Increase coordination with state agencies' interoperable communication efforts.

A technical and capabilities assessment and a self-assessment by localities based on the Interoperability Continuum will provide the baseline for these long term measures. Based on this initial assessment, a survey will be provided annually to regions and localities to measure technological advancement and rightward movement along the continuum.

IAT Updates: results and recommendations

Much of the progress this year towards the 2015 Vision was accomplished through the establishment of Initiative Action Teams (IAT). IATs were aligned around initiatives that required specific national, state, and local expertise beyond the CICO to be implemented and were comprised of SIEC members, Advisory Group members and other subject matter experts. The IATs are responsible for developing work products, making recommendations to the SIEC, and implementing the initiatives. The IATs were officially kicked off in early December 2005 and will be complete on June 30, 2006. The recommendations are complete and will be vetted by the SIEC and then posted to the website. For a look at the preliminary data for any of the topics below, please contact Chris Essid at chris.essid@governor.virginia.gov.

- Common language protocols
- Technical standards and operational protocols
- Interoperable communications equipment and services to be included on state contracts
- Mutual Aid and Interoperability Channels
- 800 MHz rebanding efforts
- 700 MHz Plan

Interoperability in Virginia

Chris Essid speaks at the Industry Summit

(Recent Events continued from page 3)

Recent speaking engagements

Virginia's interoperability efforts have been well represented throughout the Commonwealth and at various Federal Public Safety conferences. Chris Essid, Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator, and members of the SIEC were invited to speak on behalf of the Commonwealth at the following events:

- Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police Conference
- Virginia Sheriff's Association Conference
- Virginia Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) Conference
- Government Security (GovSec) Expo
- SAFECOM Industry Summit

Speaking engagements are just a part of the effort's outreach activities but are an important component to publicize the effort, teach practitioners about interoperability, and receive buy-in and feedback for major directives such as common language protocols and 800 MHz rebanding.

Chief Werner and Captain Reyes speak at the Industry Summit

Upcoming Events

- *June 6-9, 2006*—Virginia Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (VACLEA) Summer Conference. VACLEA is part of the International Campus Law Enforcement Association. It is open to all colleges and universities, both public and private. The purpose of the association is to advance public safety for educational institutions by providing educational resources, advocacy, and professional development services.

- *June 16, 2006*—Interoperability Rally for Vehicle Communications has been rescheduled. The rally will be held at the Fairfax County Police Department's driver training facility located at 3725 Stonecroft Blvd, Chantilly, Virginia. The times and schedule of events are the same as previously announced. Participants should arrive at the track between 0700 and 0730. Personnel that would like to view the event should plan on arriving at or after 1000 hrs. For more information please contact Jim Wadsworth at james.wadsworth@fairfaxcounty.gov.

- *July 1*—FY 2007 Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability implementation begins

- *October 3-4, 2006*—the 3rd Annual Statewide Interoperable Communications Conference will be held at the Renaissance Hotel in Portsmouth. On line registration and more details about the conference will be available on the interoperability website www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov within the next few weeks. *October 10-October 12, 2006*—All Hazards Forum at the Baltimore Convention Center in Baltimore, Mary-

Interoperability in Virginia

Odds & Ends

Send Us Your Lessons Learned

        The CICO had developed a lessons learned clearinghouse that includes reporting from grantees and information from on-going and existing interoperability projects throughout the Commonwealth. The CICO invites localities to submit their lessons learned to Chris Essid at chris.essid@governor.virginia.gov. Look for the lessons learned clearinghouse and the standardized format for submission on the Interoperability in Virginia website (www.interopreability.publicsafety.virginia.gov) in the upcoming weeks.

And the Survey Says…

        The CICO and IATs distributed a number of surveys the past few months to the stakeholder community trying to gather information on various issues throughout the Commonwealth. It was brought to the attention of the CICO that many of the stakeholders felt bombarded by all the communications. In addition, they weren't sure which survey was for what and therefore thought they had already completed the surveys. There were three surveys distributed:

- Mutual aid channel data collection survey with the purpose to identify all existing mutual aid channels in the Commonwealth
- Procurement Contracts Survey designed to assist VITA with ensuring that proper equipment is available on the state contracts
- Communications Outreach Survey designed to streamline communication among the associations and its members for purposes of information dissemination such as the Newsletter.

        If you did not submit a survey but would like to fill one out, please contact Melissa McMenemy at melissa.mcmenemy@governor.virginia.gov.

The Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinators Office
Governor's Office of Commonwealth Preparedness
Old City Hall Building
1001 East Broad Street
Suite 140
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, Virginia 23218
Phone: (804) 225-3800
Fax: (804) 371-7992
www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov